



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

PUBLICATIONS  
OF THE  
Modern Language Association of America  
1914

---

VOL. XXIX, 3

NEW SERIES, VOL. XXII, 3

---

XIII.—IS SHAKESPEARE ARISTOCRATIC? <sup>1</sup>

In the first scene of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* the common people are depicted as if they were English mechanics. We are led to wonder whether the contempt expressed in this play for the vile-smelling and fickle-minded Roman mob represents Shakespeare's own attitude toward his humbler fellow-citizens. Indeed, a larger question suggests itself. John Hampden was already of age in 1616, when the dramatist died; in 1649 Charles I was beheaded, and England proclaimed itself a commonwealth. Did Shakespeare appreciate at all the strength of the movement which sought to put limitations upon the king and to increase the power of the people? Where were his sympathies?

The Puritans were interested primarily in religious reforms. But they could not claim for parliament the right to regulate matters of religion without making the same demand in other fields. We find them displaying a stead-

<sup>1</sup> A few sentences of this paper have previously appeared in print.

ily increasing independence of mind and a spirit of resistance to the extreme claims of the crown.

Opposed to this growing assertiveness of the parliament and the people stood the sovereign and the nobles, the representatives of privilege and inherited authority. Certain facts undoubtedly caused Shakespeare to antagonize the Puritans, and to favor the crown and the nobility.

The Puritans were intensely opposed to the stage, wishing to suppress all theatrical performances. The London corporation, the governing body of the city, was Puritan in its sympathies, and, during Shakespeare's life-time, allowed no playhouse to exist within its jurisdiction.

We cannot wonder that the Puritans were sharply assailed by the dramatists in many plays. Shakespeare was usually too tolerant to join in this attack; but in *Twelfth Night* Maria calls Malvolio "a kind of puritan," and the comments of the other characters upon him, when they pretend to believe that he is possessed of the devil (III, iv), demand for their supreme comic effect that we should consider him a Puritan.

Stratford, the home of Shakespeare's youth and of his last years, surrendered to Puritanism. In 1568, when the poet's father was bailiff of the city, the corporation entertained actors at Stratford; but in 1602 the sentiment had changed, and the council decreed that any alderman or citizen giving his consent to the representation of plays in the Guild-hall should be fined ten shillings; and in 1612 this fine was increased to £10. The dramatist's own wife and daughters seem to have become Puritans. The epitaph upon his daughter Susanna, who died in 1649, begins:

Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,  
Wise to Salvation was good Mistress Hall,  
Something of Shakespere was in that, but this  
Wholy of him with whom she's now in blisse.

It is hard to realize that Shakespeare's own family probably felt somewhat ashamed of the career of the world's greatest poet.

Queen Elizabeth, James I, and the English nobles were as friendly to the stage as the Puritans were hostile. A famous statute of 1572 made it necessary for a company of players to obtain a license from some member of the higher nobility, permitting them to pursue their calling as his servants; otherwise they were to be considered rogues and vagabonds.

James I arrived in London from Scotland on May 7, 1603. Ten days later he granted to the company of which Shakespeare was a member a patent constituting them his servants. In the list of nine "servants" mentioned by name, Shakespeare stands second. The document is addressed "To all Justices, Maiors, Sheriffs, Constables, Hedboroughes, and other our officers and loving subjects." The favored actors are permitted to play anywhere in England.

The patent concludes with the following remarkable expression of the sovereign's personal favor: "Willing and commanding you, and every of you, as you tender our pleasure, not only to permitt and suffer them heerin, without any your letts, hindrances or molestacions . . . but also to be ayding and assisting to them yf any wrong be to them offered. And to allowe them such former Courtesies, as hathe been given to men of their place and qualitie: And also what further favor you shall show to these our servants for our sake, we shall take kindly at your hands. In witness wherof, etc." <sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Shakespeare received the friendship and the

<sup>2</sup> V. C. Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1908, p. 37.

patronage of great nobles. He dedicated two poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), to the Earl of Southampton, the second in terms of warm affection. In the chorus to Act V of *Henry V* he gives glowing praise to the Earl of Essex, the close friend of Southampton, and presumably his own friend. A record brought to light a few years ago tells of a fee paid "to Mr. Shakespeare" and "to Richard Burbadge" by the Earl of Rutland for an interesting personal service.<sup>3</sup> The Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, appearing seven years after his death, was dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Montgomery, because they had shown to the plays and to the author "so much favour."

Two significant facts may be here put side by side. In 1593 three prominent Puritans were hanged because of their obnoxious beliefs. At Christmas, 1594, William Shakespeare and others played two comedies before Queen Elizabeth.

Whether the poet was influenced by the considerations that have been indicated or not, many students believe that he favored the monarchy and the nobility, and that he was opposed to increasing the power of the people. Walt Whitman, for example, though showing in his utterances on Shakespeare a genuine appreciation of the poet's artistic greatness, has a firm belief in the anti-democratic spirit of his dramas. He says:

The great poems, Shakespeare included, are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of democracy.

Shakespeare . . . seems to me of astral genius, first-class, entirely fit for feudalism . . . there is much in him ever offensive to democracy. He is not only the tally of feudalism, but I should say

<sup>3</sup> See preface to the revised edition of Sir Sidney Lee's *A Life of William Shakespeare*, Macmillan, 1909, pp. xvi ff.

Shakespeare is incarnated, uncompromising feudalism, in literature . . . the democratic requirements . . . are not only not fulfilled in the Shakespearean productions, but are insulted on every page.

Shakespeare . . . has been called monarchical or aristocratic (which he certainly is).<sup>4</sup>

The publication in 1906 of the late Mr. Ernest Crosby's article on *Shakespeare's Attitude toward the Working Classes*,<sup>5</sup> called renewed attention to the subject before us. The paper deserves careful study; but the writer is not always fair, even disregarding at times the larger purport of passages which he cites because they contain contemptuous words directed against laborers.

If we take each idea on its good side, we may fairly say that the words aristocracy and democracy embody great complementary truths. The important question is: Does the dramatist give adequate expression to the verity contained in each of these contrasted conceptions?

## I

Let us look at the features of Shakespeare's work and the particular plays which have been considered distinctly anti-democratic in their spirit.

I quote from *Troilus and Cressida* a portion of the speech in which Ulysses explains why the Greeks have not yet succeeded in taking Troy:

Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down,  
And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master,  
But for these instances.  
The specialty of rule hath been neglected:  
And look, how many Grecian tents do stand  
Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.

<sup>4</sup> Complete Works of Walt Whitman, Putnam's, 1902, 10 Vols.: Vol. v, pp. 90, 275-6 ("Collect"); Vol. vi, 137 ("November Boughs").

<sup>5</sup> In the vol. *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*, Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1906.

. . . . . O, when degree is shaken,  
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
 Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,  
 Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,  
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
 The primogenitive and due of birth,  
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
 But by degree, stand in authentic place?  
 Take but degree away, untune that string,  
 And, hark, what discord follows! . . . . .  
 . . . . . Great Agamemnon,  
 This chaos, when degree is suffocate,  
 Follows the choking.  
 And this neglect of degree it is  
 That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose  
 It hath to climb. The general's disdain'd  
 By him one step below, he by the next,  
 That next by him beneath; so every step,  
 Exemplified by the first pace that is sick  
 Of his superior, grows to an envious fever  
 Of pale and bloodless emulation:  
 And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,  
 Not her own sinews.

I, iii, 75-136.

We have in the entire speech a very elaborate expression of what Whitman would call Shakespeare's feudal-mindedness. What right have we to accept these sentiments as Shakespeare's own?

In some of the plays there are characters who comment upon the passing action and upon larger questions of life and duty in a peculiarly tolerant, fair-minded way. These semi-detached persons may be called chorus-characters, because their comments seem, in the intention of the author, to reflect ideal truth, somewhat as do the utterances of the chorus in the Greek tragedies. Each chorus-character, though standing within the frame-work of the play, is an impartial spectator of the action, and an ideal interpreter of the play in its larger aspects. Such characters are, for example, the Duke in *Measure for Measure*,

Theseus in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Prospero in *The Tempest*, and Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*. Ulysses, wisest of the Greeks, is properly endowed by Shakespeare with the utmost sagacity. Herford calls him "the mouthpiece of Shakespeare's ripest political wisdom." It would seem, therefore, that these utterances concerning "degree" may fairly be accepted as Shakespeare's own.

Parts I and II of *Henry VI* have also been taken to show Shakespeare's aristocratic sympathies. In Part I the character of Joan of Arc is brutally misrepresented. This fact has been attributed to Shakespeare's aristocratic spirit, to his dislike that a woman of humble birth should interfere in affairs of State. But his extravagant English partisanship is more likely to be the main reason for his unchivalrous treatment of the Maid of Orleans.

In Part II, *Henry VI*, Shakespeare gives a false impression of the rebellion of 1450, headed by Jack Cade. He introduces into the story many features borrowed from the villeins' revolt of 1381. Professor Gardiner tells us that the rebellion under Cade was a justifiable revolt against intolerable abuses. Cade asked "that the burdens of the people should be diminished, the Crown estates recovered, and the Duke of York recalled from Ireland to take the place of the present councillors, . . . that is to say, that a ruler who could govern should be substituted for one who could not, and in whose name the great families plundered England."<sup>6</sup> We learn nothing about this in the play. Mr. C. W. Thomas declares that this play presents Cade's rebellion "with a mendacity, so far as I know, unsurpassed in literature."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *A Student's History of England*, Longmans, 1892, pp. 322-3.

<sup>7</sup> Edition of *II Henry VI* in *The Bankside Shakespeare*, Vol. XIX, N. Y., 1892, Intro. p. XI.



Cade claims to be a Mortimer and rightful heir to the throne of England. Like present-day reformers, he is opposed to the high cost of living.

*Cade.* Be brave, then; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny: the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it felony to drink small beer: all the realm shall be in common; and in Cheapside shall my palfry go to grass: and when I am king, as king I will be,—

*All.* God save your majesty!

*Cade.* I thank you, good people: there shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord.

*Dick.* The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

*Cade.* Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man? Some say the bee stings: but I say, 'tis the bee's wax; for I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never mine own man since (IV, ii, 69-91).

The clerk of Chatham is then brought before Cade, charged with being able to read, write, and cast accounts, and with setting copies for boys. He is pronounced guilty, and is led off to be hanged.

Says Walter Bagehot: "An audience which *bona fide* entered into the merit of this scene would never believe in everybody's suffrage. They would know that there is such a thing as nonsense; and when a man has once attained to that deep conception, you may be sure of him ever after."<sup>8</sup>

In a later scene, Cade solemnly commands "that, of the city's cost, the [little] conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign" (IV, vi, 3-5).

Thus Shakespeare ignores the bitter grievances which caused this uprising, and portrays with evident satisfac-

<sup>8</sup> *The Works of Walter Bagehot*, Hartford, Conn., 1889, Vol. i., pp. 288-9 (Essay on *Shakespeare*).

tion and drastic power the absurdities which he attributes to this English mob and their leader. Naturally this play has been looked upon as a plain manifestation of antagonism to the people.

*Julius Cæsar* and *Coriolanus* seem to show with especial clearness Shakespeare's hostility to the common folk. Professor MacCallum, in his work on *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*, brings out clearly the indifference of the poet "to questions of constitutional theory, and his inability to understand the ideals of an antique self-governing commonwealth controlled by all its free members as a body."<sup>9</sup> This mental blindness of the myriad-minded Shakespeare is manifest in these two plays.

The poet is not following Plutarch, his source, when he represents the Roman populace as entirely without intuitive political capacity, as completely fickle, ignorant, cowardly, and subject to demagogues. Plutarch's account of the wisdom and steadfastness of the common people of Rome in securing from the patricians the appointment of tribunes is ignored in *Coriolanus*, apparently because the author is "unable to conceive a popular uprising in any other terms than the outbreak of a mob."<sup>10</sup> In the play, Caius Marcius tells the plebeians:

He that depends  
Upon your favours swims with fins of lead,  
And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye?  
With every minute you do change in mind (I, i, 183-86).

It seems clear that the evil smell of the very crowds which thronged his theatre and helped to make him rich was most distasteful to the sensitive player-poet. Casca's contemptuous description of the rabble who "threw up

<sup>9</sup> Macmillan, 1910, p. 518.

<sup>10</sup> MacCallum, p. 525.

their sweaty night-caps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath" recurs many times in different forms in the dramas in which the common herd plays a part.

Hazlitt, the good democrat, dislikes intensely the play of *Coriolanus*; he is even led to attack the poetic imagination itself as a "monopolizing, aristocratical faculty" of the mind. He says:

This is the logic of the imagination and the passions; which seek to aggrandize what excites admiration and to heap contempt on misery, to raise power into tyranny, and to make tyranny absolute; to thrust down that which is low still lower, and to make wretches desperate: to exalt magistrates into kings, kings into gods; to degrade subjects to the rank of slaves, and slaves to the condition of brutes.<sup>11</sup>

Other writers also have felt the whole tone of this drama to be hostile to the people. Brandes, in his venturesome way, holds that the poet was alluding to the strained relations existing between King James and his Parliament; and believes that Shakespeare regarded the populace both of Rome and of England "wholly as mob, and looked upon their struggle for freedom as mutiny, pure and simple." He declares that "we must actually put on blinders not to see on which side Shakespeare's sympathies lie" in this play.<sup>12</sup>

I long felt a dissatisfaction with the play of *Julius Cæsar* which I could not explain. I think that I have succeeded in determining the cause. I believe it to be a defect in this play that nowhere in the last two Acts does Brutus express any sorrow because the republic is hopelessly overthrown. At the beginning of the drama Brutus

<sup>11</sup> *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, Bohn Library, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> *William Shakespeare*, one vol. ed., Macmillan, 1899, pp. 534, 536, 542, etc.

is intensely afraid that a monarchy will be established in Rome. This is why he suspects Cæsar.

I do fear, the people  
Choose Cæsar for their king (I, ii, 79-80).

The memory of the elder Brutus, who expelled the Tarquins, calls loudly upon him to defend the Roman republic from danger.

Why is it, at the close of the play, that Brutus has forgotten all about the republic; that he is nowhere concerned for the cause to which he was formerly devoted, and for the sake of which he killed his dear friend Cæsar? The fickleness of the people may well have convinced him that a republic is impossible in Rome, but there should at least be some reference to his lost hopes. The conclusion of the drama is in this respect a plain *non sequitur*. It would be a far more powerful catastrophe if we could see Brutus meet death for a principle. As the play stands, he seems to be interested solely in the question how he may die in good form. Why is this weakness allowed to mar the close of the tragedy? My own belief is that Shakespeare, when he was writing this play, had no sympathy with the idea of a republic, that he was personally antagonistic to the democratic spirit, and that at this point, perhaps unconsciously, the needs of the tragedy were disregarded to suit his individual opinions, his personal prejudices.

Mr. Crosby feels that the following lines from *The Tempest* are an insult to the laboring classes:

*Prospero.* We'll visit Caliban my slave, who never  
Yields us kind answer.

*Miranda.* 'Tis a villain, sir,  
I do not love to look on.

*Prospero.*

But, as 'tis,

We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,  
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices  
That profit us (I, ii, 308-13).

In two of his last comedies Shakespeare seems to assert the almost magical power of royal blood to ennoble its possessor. In *Cymbeline* two young princes, ignorant of their kingly origin, have lived from infancy in a mountain cave with the banished courtier Belarius. This foster-father has reared them carefully, but the only explanation which he offers for their princely bearing is the fact of their royal blood: "How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature!"

This same conception is carried to an impossible extreme in *The Winter's Tale*. Perdita, a king's daughter, is brought up from infancy by a shepherd and his wife, and supposes herself to be their child. She grows up without any means of education, so far as we can learn, but seems to be educated, nevertheless. Not only has she exquisite refinement, but in charming poetry she alludes to the stories of classical mythology with complete knowledge and appreciation. The mere possession of royal blood explains it all. Not only does blood tell in her case, but it tells her all that other people learn by hard study. Polixenes, the disguised king of Bohemia, says, as he watches her:

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
Ran on the green-sward: nothing she does or seems  
But smacks of something greater than herself,  
Too noble for this place (IV, iv, 156-59).

Is there not something of courtier-like servility in this extreme glorification of kingly blood?

The fact that Magna Charta is not referred to in any way in Shakespeare's *King John* seems at first sight to

prove conclusively that he was hostile to democratic ideas. But Shakespeare's drama follows very closely the order of the incidents in his source, the old play called *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, printed in 1591. *The Troublesome Reign* knows nothing of Magna Charta, and Shakespeare does not appear to have made an independent study of the history of that period.

## II

It is now time to turn to the other side, to examine the elements in Shakespeare's work and the individual plays which show a sympathy for the plain people, an appreciation of the essential worth of lowly men and women. And first let us note that some of the plays that have already been cited are not so distinctly and strongly anti-democratic in their tendency as they have sometimes been supposed to be.

In Renan's philosophical drama *Caliban*, written as a sequel to *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's slave-monster is made into a personification of ignorant democracy, of "the eternal plebeian." But Renan, writing long after the French Revolution, is developing an interesting conception of his own, not interpreting Shakespeare. *The Tempest* was almost certainly written in 1611. The dramatist probably had especially in mind the experiences of the English settlers in the new colony of Virginia. No political interpretation of the relation of Caliban to Prospero is so likely to be true as that which makes Caliban represent the savage serving the settler. Professor R. G. Moulton has worked this out in some detail.<sup>13</sup> I do not believe

<sup>13</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, 3d ed., Clarendon Press, 1893, pp. 250-1.

that Caliban was intended by Shakespeare to represent the ignorant populace of England.

So far as the play of *Coriolanus* contains a wise, impartial chorus-character, whose opinions we may accept as those of the poet himself, it is the humorous old patrician Menenius Agrippa, a rôle which is mainly the creation of Shakespeare. Menenius reasons in a kindly way with the populace, and wins them by the force and fairness of his words. He is the character in the play with whom we can most fully sympathize. It is certainly the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius whom the poet scorns most of all. They are artful demagogues of the most unworthy type. But we cannot look upon the central figure of the play as entirely admirable; it is impossible to believe that Shakespeare's full sympathy is given to the proud, intractable, self-destroyed Coriolanus.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* the wives of two plain citizens have our entire sympathy as against the knight who would seduce them. This play certainly shows no aristocratic bias. We have "ordinary human beings poking fun at a knight," as Mr. Appleton Morgan puts it.<sup>14</sup>

The play of *Henry V* displays a democratic spirit, even though monarchy is the accepted form of government. This drama is the climax of the historical plays; and the youthful Henry Fifth has been considered to be "Shakespeare's ideal of active, practical, heroic manhood."

Throughout this play, Shakespeare feels that his ideal king must show himself the wise leader of a united, capable people. He sees that a thoughtful, intelligently coöperating soldiery is necessary in order to reflect the truest honor upon their king and general.

<sup>14</sup> Intro. to ed. of *Merry Wives in The Bankside Shakespeare*, Vol. I, N. Y., 1888, p. 1.

In the latter portion of Act III, Scene ii, Shakespeare introduces an English captain, a Welsh captain, a Scotch, and an Irish, all loyal and efficient fellow-soldiers. This passage seems to be Shakespeare's prophecy of a unified Great Britain, a prophecy which is not yet wholly fulfilled.

Act IV, Scene i, is soundly democratic in spirit. On the night before Agincourt, King Henry goes in disguise among the common soldiers, discussing the situation with them, learning their sentiments, and inspiring them with bravery. The play emphasizes the courage of the plain soldiers. The king grieves because his men are enfeebled with sickness; but, in spite of their "lank-lean cheeks and war-worn coats," they patiently and bravely await the coming battle.

The great address of King Henry to his army in Act IV, Scene iii, is filled with a spirit of genuine brotherhood. He is above his soldiers in place, but one with them in spirit.

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
 Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named,  
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.  
 He that shall live this day, and see old age,  
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
 And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian":  
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
 And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."  
 . . . . . then shall our names,  
 Familiar in his mouth as household words,  
 Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,  
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,  
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.  
 This story shall the good man teach his son;  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
 From this day to the ending of the world,  
 But we in it shall be remember'd;  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;



For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition:  
And gentlemen in England now a-bed  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

(IV, iii, 41-67.)

Probably the finest motto that aristocracy ever produced is *noblesse oblige*, rank imposes obligation. Democracy would reverse this, and insist that the performance of duty is the right way of winning rank. Our democratic king almost reaches this position in the words just quoted.

Mr. Crosby's explanation that Shakespeare here "puts flattering words into the mouth of Henry V," is manifestly unfair. Harry's words are genuine, sincere. Fortunately these words are read a hundred times oftener than the labored plea for "degree," rank, in the enigmatic and unpleasing *Troilus and Cressida*.

In *All's Well That Ends Well* the lowly-born Helena loves the nobly-born Bertram. The King of France, on condition that she shall cure him of a malignant disease, has promised to give to Helena the husband that she shall choose. She is the daughter of a famous physician now dead, knows some of her father's remedies, and succeeds in curing the King. She then chooses Bertram for her husband; but he is unwilling to accept her. Bertram's mother, the charming old countess of Rousillon, has brought up Helena, and loves and favors her foster-daughter.

In Shakespeare's source, the English translation of one of Boccaccio's stories, the king is 'very loath' to grant Bertram to Helena; but the dramatist remakes the story completely at this point. In the play the King gladly favors Helen's wish, and makes light of noble birth in

comparison with essential worth. He says to the unwilling Bertram:

'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which  
I can build up. Strange is it that our bloods,  
Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,  
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off  
In differences so mighty. If she be  
All that is virtuous, save what thou dislikest,  
A poor physician's daughter, thou dislikest  
Of virtue for the name: but do not so:  
From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,  
The place is dignified by the doer's deed:

. . . . .  
The property by what it is should go,  
Not by the title. She is young, wise, fair;  
In these to nature she's immediate heir,  
And these breed honour: . . . . .  
. . . . . honours thrive,  
When rather from our acts we them derive  
Than our foregoers: . . . . .  
. . . . . What should be said?  
If thou canst like this creature as a maid,  
I can create the rest: virtue and she  
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.

(II, iii, 124-51.)

These democratic words make as little of social distinctions founded upon blood alone as do the lines of Goldsmith:

Princes and lords may flourish or may fade,—  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made.

Walter Bagehot believes that a peculiar tenet of Shakespeare's political creed "is a disbelief in the middle classes. We fear," says Bagehot, that "he had no opinion of traders . . . when a 'citizen' is mentioned, he generally does or says something absurd." But these statements need much qualification. In *Richard III*, in the next scene after we learn of the death of Edward IV, three

citizens of London meet upon the street and discuss the political outlook. They appreciate fully the ominous condition of affairs. "O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester!" says one of them. All the citizens are impressed by the dangerous situation.

Truly, the souls of men are full of dread:  
 Ye cannot reason almost with a man  
 That looks not heavily and full of fear.  
 (II, iii, 38-40.)

Indeed, it is a common thing for Shakespeare to assume that the instincts and judgments of the people as a whole are wise and right. The good Duke Humphrey in *II Henry VI* is loved by the common people. King Claudius dares not take any open steps against Hamlet because the prince is loved by the folk, "the general gender." The populace are hostile to King John because they fear that he has murdered the young prince Arthur. Mr. Crosby overlooks this right-mindedness of the English laborers, as Shakespeare portrays them, and seems to be affronted by the realistic details in the following lines:

I saw a smith stand with his hammer, thus,  
 The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,  
 With open mouth swallowing a tailor's news;  
 Who, with his shears and measure in his hand,  
 Standing on slippers, which his nimble haste  
 Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet,  
 Told of a many thousand warlike French  
 That were embattailed and rank'd in Kent:  
 Another lean unwash'd artificer  
 Cuts off his tale and talks of Arthur's death.  
 (*King John*, IV, ii, 193-202.)

Charles Cowden Clarke makes the following comparison between Shakespeare and Scott with reference to the way in which they present the relation of master and servant:

We may observe the different sentiment of Shakespeare as regards menial attachment, and that of Sir Walter Scott, who has so often been compared with him. Shakespeare, who in his love for his species seems to have been a cosmophilanthropist, took an evident pleasure in uniting the several grades of society in the bonds of mutual respect and unselfish attachment. . . . He has therefore constantly identified both master and man in one common interest. . . . If we retrace the stories of Sir Walter Scott, we, I think, uniformly perceive that his idea of the connection between master and servant is strictly *feudal*. Throughout his writings we scarcely meet with any other idea of their reciprocal duties than that of irresponsible sway and command on the one hand, with mechanical and implicit obedience on the other, and not a spark of free and intrinsic attachment existing between them.<sup>15</sup>

The contrast just indicated may not be entirely accurate; but there certainly are many examples in Shakespeare of devoted love between servant and master. Call to mind the faithful steward of Timon of Athens; the attachment between Brutus and his page Lucius; the fidelity of the aged Adam to Orlando; the faithful service of Pisanio to Posthumus and Imogen; the pitying attendant who watches over Lady Macbeth as she walks in sleep; and the former groom of Richard II, who, just before Richard is murdered, seeks out his old master in order to express his affection.

Shakespeare's darkest, bitterest plays are probably *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. The darkness of *King Lear* is illumined by Cordelia. The fidelity of his steward Flavius forces Timon to admit that the world contains "one honest man." But *Troilus and Cressida* contains neither a good woman nor a good servant. It is in this unpleasant play that we find the lines upon "degree," Shakespeare's most elaborate setting forth

<sup>15</sup> Cited by W. J. Rolfe in his old edition of *Cymbeline*, Harper, 1898, pp. 28-29, from the *unpublished* Second Series of the *Shakespeare-Characters*, loaned to him by Mrs. Cowden-Clarke.

of feudal principles. It seems to have been when the poet's mind was least wholesome that it was most aristocratic.

### III

Mr. Denton J. Snider holds that "the purely moral stand-point is not strong in Shakespeare; he is decidedly institutional. He has portrayed no great, heroic, triumphant personage whose career is essentially moral, and who collided with the established system of an epoch and ultimately overthrew it by his thought and example, like Socrates or Christ. . . . The sympathies of Shakespeare were decidedly conservative, institutional."<sup>16</sup>

A recent writer, Miss Gildersleeve, speaks thus of Shakespeare's detachment from the political questions of his own day:

Obviously in sympathy with the government and the customs prevailing in his time, the great poet seems to have looked with some contempt upon the populace and their desire for civic rights. But on the whole such questions interested him little,—and religion apparently scarcely at all. The persons with whom he associated, the audiences for whom he wrote, the patrons who assisted him, had no real concern with these ideas which were about to revolutionize the nation.<sup>17</sup>

If these words are correct, then Caius Marcius expresses a feeling like Shakespeare's own when he says contemptuously of the Roman populace:

They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know  
What's done i' the Capitol

(*Coriolanus*, I, i, 195-6.)

<sup>16</sup> *The Shakespearean Drama: The Tragedies*, St. Louis, 1887, Intro., p. xxxix.

<sup>17</sup> *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1908, pp. 135-6.

A better expression of the American ideal of government than that given in these words could hardly be found.

Mr. George Bernard Shaw says:

I define the first order in Literature as consisting of those works in which the author, instead of accepting the current morality and religion ready-made without any question as to their validity, writes from an original moral standpoint of his own, thereby making his book an original contribution to morals, religion, and sociology, as well as to *belles lettres*. I place Shakespeare with Dickens, Scott, Dumas *père*, etc., in the second order, because, though they are enormously entertaining, their morality is ready-made.<sup>18</sup>

These are cogent words; but what writers can be placed in the first order? The great Goethe would very plainly be excluded. Who, in addition to the redoubtable Mr. Shaw himself, is to be included in this select company?

How far does the conservative character of Shakespeare's mind lessen his greatness? Could he have portrayed the world for us with all the fulness and delight for which we thank him if his attention had been diverted to doctrinaire schemes for reform? This much, however, I admit: if in Shakespeare's own thinking he had no vision of the coming of more democratic institutions, then by so much his strong mind failed him.

#### CONCLUSION

Great poets sum up and interpret the entire development of civilization up to their own time. The greatest pass on from this to forecast in some degree what is to come. Seeing the invisible future, they become true seers, and

<sup>18</sup> In the vol. *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*, Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1907, pp. 166-7.

do attain  
To something like prophetic strain.

Plainly the author of *All's Well* and *Henry V* had some measure of this forward vision. If not a John the Baptist of democracy, he was at least one of the prophets.

Shakespeare's natural affinities were with the court and the nobility, the wealthy and influential patrons of the stage. His usual ideal of government was the rule of a benevolent despot, assisted by public-spirited nobles. His general attitude toward society was plainly aristocratic. But he would not be the many-sided genius that the world honors if he had accepted the restrictions of any one set of men, if he had rested content with a single point of view. Man so delighted him, and women too, that he transcended at times the limitations of his own class, and felt his way to a very clear expression of some of the choicest ideas that we associate with the conception of democracy. No one has expressed more effectively than Shakespeare the great truths that rank and honor should be the reward of proved merit; that the settled opinion of the entire people is probably right; that birth is of small importance in comparison with worth; and that faithful love, irrespective of rank, is the greatest thing in the world. Shakespeare has not expressed all the truth about human nature and society, for all time; but who else has expressed so much? Take him for all in all, we shall hardly look upon his like again.

ALBERT H. TOLMAN.